

## The Echo

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# Bloodlines 1988

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# BLOODLINES 1988

Kristen Layne

*Author's Note: By the end of 1988, 82,362 cases of AIDS had been reported in the U.S. Of those, there were 61,816 deaths. Treatment, though newly available, was largely ineffective.*

SAN FRANCISCO, 1985-1988

LONDON

You can't.

AVA

I've been here for months, London.

LONDON

No you haven't. It's a mistake. I would have-

AVA

You would have noticed me? Think about it.

LONDON

Think of what?

AVA

Think of when.

LONDON

Think of when?

AVA

January.

LONDON

January.

AVA

You were sick.

LONDON

It was January. I had the flu.

AVA

No you didn't.

LONDON

It was you. It's been that long?

AVA

Yes. January.

LONDON

What did I do?

AVA

You know what you did.

LONDON

But I don't. You can leave. Anytime you like.

AVA

I can't. You know that.

LONDON

So what now?

AVA

We could be friends.

LONDON

We'll never be friends.

AVA

Won't we?

LONDON

I could never-

AVA

But you will. Do you know why? Because I'll never, never leave you. I'm here.  
Always.

-----  
LONDON

People started guessing. It was 1986. Mostly she stayed home and I stayed home, but she went to work with me sometimes and we went out to dinner and around town and to buy sweet potatoes when they were at the farmer's market. You can forget a lot of Georgia but you can't forget sweet potatoes. So we'd go to the farmer's market.

AVA

She didn't see her friends as much. I wouldn't let her. They thought she had a lover. But she didn't. She just couldn't risk it.

ALLEN

Ava, she's complicated. Not everyone can see her, right? She's like an imaginary friend... but she's very, very real.

-----

1985. *THE SAN FRANCISCO ENQUIRER*.

ALLEN

So you can type.

LONDON

Yes, sir.

ALLEN

You don't need to "sir" me.

LONDON

100 words a minute on a good machine, sir.

ALLEN

Now you're toying with me.

LONDON

The speed or the sir?

ALLEN

Oh boy. You'll be doing obituaries. Evans handwrites his on yellow legal pads. We'll be doing his soon enough, though.



-----

AVA

I can't kill you by looking at you. So watch how you look at me. You might've met me yourself and don't even know it yet. You think you're so much holier than thou.

LONDON

Or maybe you just think you're safe because you're white. And make \$30K a year. And live in Berkeley. Well let me tell you -- I'm white and I live in Berkeley and I wasn't safe. Fuck 4H. I'm not Haitian, hemophiliac, homosexual, or a heroin addict. I'm white, clean, straight, and whole-blooded. Or at least I was.

Sure I've shot up. I'm 22 years old and I'm a writer in San Francisco.

ALLEN

But it got too old.

MATT

Not to mention expensive.

LONDON

Did I meet her at one of those parties?

ALLEN

Maybe, maybe not. I mean, she's everywhere now.

MATT

Walk up Haight and you'll brush elbows.

LONDON

Bathroom stall,

ALLEN

bar fight,

MATT

one night stand,

LONDON

she's there.

MATT

Maybe you met her at a party or maybe an old boyfriend introduced her to you.

LONDON

You just know, after awhile, that you've always known her.

ALLEN

She's sadistic. The emerging bruises, the achiness, the headaches, even the control of food. She'll starve you if you don't watch out. She'll starve you anyway.

-----

*The San Francisco Enquirer*

ALLEN

You eat lunch late.

LONDON

It's quiet.

ALLEN

I know. It's my quiet space.

LONDON

You're eating peanut butter and jelly.

ALLEN

Peanut butter and banana.

LONDON

On Wonder Bread.

ALLEN

On Wonder Bread. I'm secretly eight years old.

LONDON

Diversions is short again this week.

ALLEN

Diversions is always short.

LONDON

Do you take submissions from the floor?

ALLEN

Do you have something?

LONDON

I have a lot of somethings. But I think I have something that will work.

ALLEN

Give it here.

*(beat. He holds out his hand.)*

Give me the pen.

*(beat)*

Well, your lead's atrocious, but we could run something like this. The Haight angle, twenty years later. It would add some flair.

LONDON

I know.

ALLEN

But you're not leaving obituaries anytime soon.

LONDON

So can I keep submitting?

ALLEN

We'll run this one and see.

-----

LONDON

I still went out with my neighbors from the Haight. There was a bar in the old fallout shelter across the street from our building. We'd shove tables together and line up Jagarbombs and run lines of coke from the backs of chairs, using scribbled copy ripped in half and rolled in place of the hundred dollar bills we heard they used uptown.

Allen took me to the *Examiner* editorial Christmas party, where they drank champagne in bowls, not flutes, observed the legs of burgundies and blondes and ran lines of coke from pin-striped suit sleeves, using Benjamins. We got bored and left early and stumbled through the park and met up with the guys at Valhalla. That was the name of the bar.

-----



1986. NEW YEARS EVE.

LONDON

You know, I've never liked crab cakes.

ALLEN

You know, I've never liked cheese with little toothpicks shoved into it.

LONDON

Look at them. They take themselves so seriously. Their little champagne bowls...

ALLEN

The artichoke hearts.

LONDON

The bouquet of the Merlot...

*(beat)*

Do you think they know I'm just a copy editor?

ALLEN

Of course not. They probably think I hired you to come with me.

LONDON

What is that supposed to mean?

ALLEN

That you look like an escort?

LONDON

An escort?

ALLEN

In a good way.

LONDON

In a good way...

ALLEN

Do you want to leave?

LONDON

With you?



ALLEN

Well, I brought you here.

LONDON

You just called me a whore.

ALLEN

I called you an escort.

LONDON

Are we going to debate specifics?

ALLEN

Are you going to leave with me?

LONDON

Yes. I suppose so.

ALLEN

Then we ran to the Golden Gate Bridge.

LONDON

I was stoned of course with stilettos in my hand and in stocking feet. And we leaned too far out over the edge, reading the signs aloud that say "Life is Worth It. Don't Jump." And wondering what would happen if we did.

ALLEN

We kissed in the mist off the ocean and ran to the Ritz Carlton where we made hot toddies. We registered under false names and never paid for the room or the room service.

-----

LONDON

I took a week off in October. I flew to Georgia for my sister's wedding. When I got back, Allen was sick.

AVA

They were fine, they took a sick day, they were dead. It happened over and over and over and finally you wonder if it was like this when the bubonic plague came through London. I remember writing a paper in high school; the doctors wore these beaks stuffed with herbs. They thought it would protect them. We laugh about it now, make a joke of it, and then you tell us that protection really works.

ALLEN

And now we get it. But you tell that to lovers in 1986 and it doesn't make sense.

LONDON

For a long time I didn't visit Allen. A long time -- a month. I was scared. I thought if I worked, if I edited enough copy and Chloroxed the copy desk and took enough showers I could... not.

-----

*1987. A BERKELEY APARTMENT. A hospital bed, containing ALLEN, is set up in the living room. AVA sits quietly in the corner.*

MATT

Hi, you must be London.

LONDON

Yes, is this--

MATT

Allen's? Yes. I'm Matt.

LONDON

Matt...

MATT

I'm... I live here too. He didn't tell you.

LONDON

No. But...

MATT

Well...

LONDON

Doesn't matter.

It never occurred to me to ask why he hadn't told me about Matt; it was 1987. I locked up the apartment in the Haight and moved into Allen and Matt's room. Matt slept on the couch.

MATT

We took turns changing out the fluids -- banana bags, the nurse called them.

LONDON

She would have changed them but we had to do something.

MATT

He had an infection. He had pneumonia.

LONDON

The infection got better. The pneumonia got worse.

MATT

The pneumonia got better. The infection got worse.

LONDON

He got a new infection.

ALLEN

I'm trying to decide how old I am.

LONDON

What do you mean? Your birthday's next week. You'll be 34.

ALLEN

Right. But I feel 90.

MATT

Well, maybe you can be both right now.

ALLEN

I feel old.

MATT

You're not old.

ALLEN

I know. But I feel it.  
You should get tested. You look thin.

LONDON



It's because I've been worried about you.

ALLEN

You should get tested.

-----

*A waiting room.*

LONDON

You'd think they could get the posters right.

MATT

You'd think.

LONDON

Or at least update them regularly.

MATT

They do. They just update the numbers more regularly.

LONDON

They could at least put cushions on the chairs.

MATT

Stop complaining.

LONDON

Stop worrying.

MATT

You get what this means.

LONDON

Of course I do.

*(beat)*

MATT

Well, that's me.

*MATT stands and leaves the waiting area.*

LONDON

Next. *(stands)*

*They stand opposite each other, open letters. The results are as they expected.*

MATT

Did they invite you into the trial too?

LONDON

Yeah. Yeah they did.

-----

*A coffee shop.*

LONDON

I think I'm on the placebo.

MATT

What's your count?

LONDON

Average.

MATT

Average negative or average positive?

LONDON

Average positive.

MATT

Could be keeping you from crashing.

LONDON

Could be. But look at you.

MATT

What about me?

LONDON

Can I buy you a bagel?

MATT

I'm not hungry.

LONDON

I know you're not. Can I buy you a bagel?

MATT

Why?

LONDON

Look at you.

MATT

It's helping. My numbers are good.

LONDON

Let me buy you a bagel.

MATT

Enough with the bagel! *(beat)* Why are you being like this?

LONDON

*(pained pause)* Because Allen won't eat anymore. And neither will you.

MATT

Allen is dying.

LONDON

And you—

MATT

My numbers are good.

-----

March 1987

LONDON

They legalized AZT in March. \$10,000 to put a kitchen timer on the electric chair. But of course we bought in, who wouldn't? The rope was a little bit longer. One fewer bullet in six-cartridge Russian roulette. Maybe it would make a difference.



MATT

And then Allen died.

*MATT exits.*

LONDON

And then Matt hung himself. He left his bottle of pills on the bathroom counter for me. I was alone in their apartment. They'd taken the rope away when they came for the body; it was thin cord, only rated to 100 pounds. That's all he had needed.

-----

*A Mirror, 1988*

LONDON

Well.

AVA

Well.

LONDON

How long do I get?

AVA

How long do you think?

LONDON

What is this to you, a game?

AVA

Maybe. You said yourself it's like Russian Roulette.

LONDON

That's sick.

AVA

I mean, the odds are getting better for you. How many bullets down?

LONDON

Allen, Matt. But that's not how odds work.

You can't pin Matt on me.

AVA

Yes, I can.

LONDON

You look different.

AVA

I look tired.

LONDON

You cut your hair off.

AVA

It keeps falling out. I'm shedding.

LONDON

But the drugs are working.

AVA

I'm still sick.

LONDON

But your numbers...

AVA

Fuck the numbers. It's binary. There's positive and negative. Nothing else matters.

LONDON

You look tired.

AVA

I'm 24 years old and I haven't been able to live.

LONDON

That's the drugs.

AVA

The drugs are because of you.

LONDON

AVA

And I'm because of you.  
How long are they going to work, anyway?

LONDON

My heart's beating too fast. I feel like I'm running out.

AVA

Which of us is killing you?

LONDON

I'm running a fever. Constantly. I'm 97 pounds.

AVA

It's the drugs.

LONDON

It's you.

AVA

I'm you. I'm going to win.

LONDON

I know.

AVA

Why destroy yourself?

LONDON

To keep you from doing it.

AVA

Do you hear yourself? What do you want?

LONDON

My life.

AVA

You can't have that. What do you want?

LONDON

What do I want? I want sweet potatoes.



AVA

What?

LONDON

I want sweet potatoes. In Georgia. But you can't give me that. You can't give me anything.

AVA

You're stopping the drugs. You're picking me over them for some reason.

LONDON

\$10,000 a year for AZT. I'm taking my year. I'm taking my \$10,000. I'm going to Spain. Then I'm going to Georgia. I'm going to eat sweet potatoes. And I'm going to die.

At this point, it's the only way I can win.